

# SOCIAL ACTION

JUNE 15, 1951

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A large, stylized line drawing of a clenched fist, rendered in black outlines on a green background. The fist is positioned centrally, with the thumb tucked in and the fingers curled. The drawing uses thick, expressive lines to define the hand's structure.

LAND TENURE REFORM  
AND THE CHURCHES

# SOCIAL ACTION

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## Land Tenure Reform and the Churches

A friend recently overheard the following comment at a church women's fellowship meeting: "Of course, I don't really care what happens to the farmers. I get my food at the A and P."

This remark, for all its stupidity, is very nearly representative of a widespread attitude in America. The technological revolution has made it possible for less than 18 per cent of our country's population to feed all America and to have a surplus for export. The 82 per cent of us who do not farm easily overlook such simple, important facts of life as these:

- Every bite of food we eat comes ultimately from the sea or from the thin layer of top soil (six inches on the average) which covers the land areas of the earth. If this thin layer is exhausted those A and P counters will be awfully bare.
- The majority of the people in most countries are engaged in agriculture—in some areas, 80 and 90 per cent.
- Despite all this farming, half the people in the world go to bed hungry every night.
- When we talk about technical assistance to underdeveloped areas we must nearly always in the first instance talk about agricultural assistance.
- "It is imperative," to quote the report of President Truman's International Development Advisory Board (Nelson A. Rockefeller, chairman), "that land reform should be encouraged where it is needed to provide security of tenure. In some countries neither the fight against hunger nor the fight against subversion can be won without land reform."
- When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are really asking God to concern Himself with one of the most complex economic and political issues of our time.

I earnestly hope that the lady who buys her food from the A and P, and a good many other Americans who live in cities, will read thoughtfully the discussions by Joseph Ackerman and Ira Moomaw in this issue of *Social Action*.

—SHIRLEY E. GREENE\*

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\*Mr. Greene is the Agricultural Relations Secretary of the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches.



## LAND REFORM —

### A Christian Challenge

*By I. W. Moomaw*

A Christian farmer in India once led me into his little cottage to hear him read what he called "the song of land." He could not read, but he took the Bible from a teakwood stool and asked me to follow the page while he quoted. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," he began. Then he completed the Twenty-fourth Psalm, weighing each word as he spoke. As he repeated the first verse he said, "That is about us and our fields."

He had three little fields, seven acres in all. A foresighted missionary had helped him with a loan to buy the first one nearly thirty years ago. He said, "The land is our life; our four children were reared from it." One of them was a minister, one daughter a trained nurse, another married to a nearby farmer, and the younger son was with his father. "As my strength fails Soma takes up the plow," he said.

"It is a cycle of life," I replied.

"No," he said, "land is God's arm providing for man." Then, as if speaking for all the peasant farmers of Asia, he said, "Who could live without land?"

Around the world man's dependence upon land is reflected in the beliefs and folklore of the people. Mohammedans speak of "golden land" as they refer to special fields which tradition says were given to their more valiant forefathers by Allah himself. Egyptians like to be known as "sons of the black earth." The Indians of the High Andes still nourish the hope of recovering their land that was taken from their ancestors at the time of the Spanish invasion. A young missionary was once preaching to a company of Indians about the second coming of Christ.

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Mr. Moomaw is Educational Secretary of Agricultural Missions, Inc., New York.

One man asked, "When that time comes, will we get our land back?"

### *A Troubled World Conscience*

Living in the midst of abundant land and crop surpluses it is hard for us to comprehend man's critical and naked dependence upon land. The thin blanket of topsoil spread over the small productive portion of the earth provides our only hope of survival. Deprived of the privilege of sowing and reaping for a period of fifteen months, the human race would face disaster. Agriculture differs from other occupations in that wide space is required for plant growth. Agriculturists of Europe and parts of Asia give careful study to the amount of land space required for different kinds of plants. I once spoke with a Japanese farmer while he pruned leaves from his persimmon trees. He said, "I prune for two reasons. Take off enough leaves to admit sunlight to the plants under the tree; leave on enough leaves to mature the fruit on the trees." Land is a unique form of property. It is a gift of nature and although man can by effort increase the present volume of arable land, limits are set by various strictures of nature—the ultimate one being the fact that the total quantity of land is fixed.

Land is a major concern to over a billion people in the world today. As population mounts, the fierce struggle for land begins as men vie with each other to get little plots to cultivate. It would be a serious error to underestimate the importance of land as a factor in the revolutionary movements sweeping much of our world.

For the first time in history the world began to face its man-land problems seriously when the United Nations Conference on National Resources was convened in August, 1949 with 520 delegates present from forty-seven different countries. The Commission on Land and Land Tenure drew by far the largest proportion of delegates. At the opening session Mr. Trygve Lie declared, "The areas of acute distress are no longer local problems. Our presence here records our acceptance of them as world issues."



## *The Land Situation*

Briefly, what is the land situation of Asia? The Indian Famine Commission has calculated that 1.5 acres of cropland per person are needed in order to provide a reasonable minimum diet. But what do we find? Japan has only .3 acre per person. The people there are now trying to survive with twenty-five per cent less food than was their meager lot before World War II.

Korea has .5 acre of cropland per person. Even before the recent tragedy there, the Korean people with only 1470 calories per person were the most poorly fed in the whole family of nations. India and China each have .7 acre of cropland per person. Egypt, a country often overlooked, has .4 acre. Farming in Egypt has been frozen to the pattern of three thousand years ago, but the land tenure situation is deteriorating. Most of the country is desert, with the processes of erosion ever narrowing the valley of the Nile. Seventy per cent of the people are farmers, with a population density of 1700 per square mile of cultivated land.

This shortage of land in agrarian countries places tenants and laborers at a serious disadvantage. The landlord can play one tenant against the other until rents are bid up to a point which leaves only the barest margin of survival. In some parts of India it has been customary, since 1930, for tenants to pay half the land tax in addition to the customary amount of rent. A special fee, or extra portion of the crop, must be paid for grazing the narrow strip of land at the edge of fields.

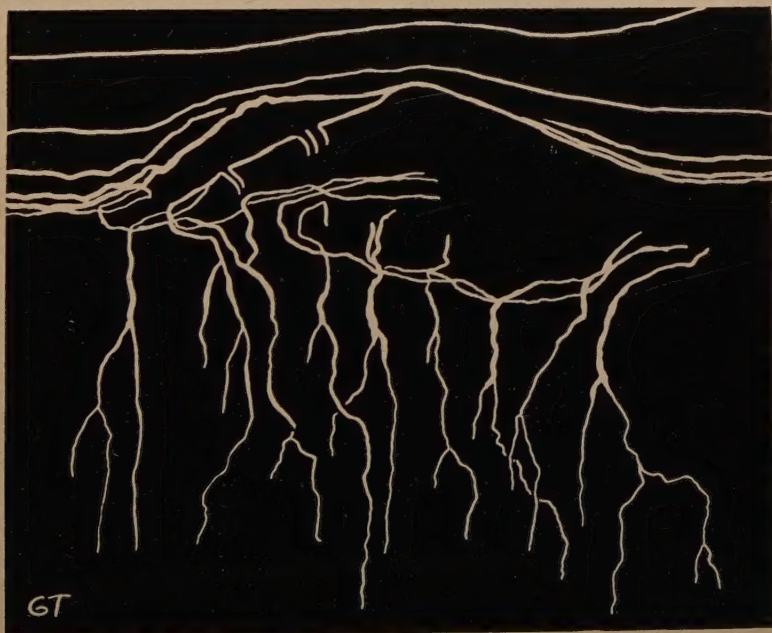
In other areas such as the United States, Africa, and parts of Latin America, there is still an ample supply of land, but minority groups often do not have access to it on reasonable tenure arrangements. Share cropping, peonage, and like systems of tenure which dwarf personality are steadily coming under the scrutiny of an awakened world conscience. To work out more equitable relationships among people in the use of land promises to be one of our most urgent tasks during the years immediately ahead.

## *Tenure Classes*

In general there are four classes of people on the basis of access to land:

(1) Those who hold land primarily as a privileged class. The city farmer, the absentee landlord, the money lender of Asia, and the speculator in land are typical of this group. This becomes a vicious evil in densely populated areas where families experience difficulty in getting land for homes. There are also those who hold large tracts for hunting or private parks.

(2) Those who are family farmers, owning the land and farming it as a means of earning a living. Jefferson no doubt had these people in mind when he declared, "It is our purpose that the cultivator shall own the land he tills." The stability of any government and the strength of its institutions depend in a large measure upon the number of people in this class. The story of Korea might be quite different today if that country had





been spared the social and political drain of a feudalistic land system.

(3) Those who farm land owned by others and pay for its use under one or more of the different systems for renting.

Tenancy may have many values depending in part upon the relative power of the landlord and tenant in the system. There are farmers who prefer operating larger farms of good land to small farms of poorer land which they might be able to own. It is also a good starting place for younger farmers.

(4) The peasant laborer, the wage hand, or the peon, whose only tenure in land is the privilege to work on it for wages. Millions in Asia, and our own army of migrant laborers who trek from crop to crop, are members of this tragic group. Seldom can they see any hope of having land to cultivate for themselves.

The countries most subject to political revolution and agrarian unrest are often those having a strong landed class on the one hand and a landless class on the other. In one Latin American country where revolution in government is common, ninety-four per cent of the people own no land. Forty per cent of the land is held by three per cent of the people. Communist agitators take advantage of this unrest as they promise free land to their followers.

The mere re-distribution of land itself is not land reform. Done ruthlessly it can even create new problems as dangerous as those it seeks to amend. Just and constructive land reform must be viewed not as an economic expedient but as an ongoing ethical and moral process. In a dynamic society it is fallacious to assume that the land question can be settled once for all. While there must be a central core of policy, there is need for sensitive adjustment from time to time to meet changing social and economic contingencies. As Brooks Hays, Congressman from Arkansas, has observed, " 'Social opinion should always be in advance of law and the greater or less happiness of the people depends upon the narrowness of the gulf between them.' (Sir Henry Maine) The Christian's interest in land is, therefore,



centered less in legal concepts than the moral principles which underlie them.”\*

### *Guideposts of Land Reform Policy*

The urgency of land reform in a world struggling to become one community makes it essential that we formulate guideposts of land policy having more or less world-wide validity. Some of these would be:

(1) Wide distribution of land among those needing it for cultivation, with adequate freedom in its use, and ownership by the tiller as the goal.

(2) Reasonable assurance of continued occupancy on the part of those who rent land.

(3) Discouragement of absentee ownership, landlordism, and non-social uses of land. (This should not discriminate against the just rights of widows, elderly people, or other cases of valid need.)

(4) Equitable division of returns from land in proportion to the respective contributions of both landlord and tenant. The tenant must be safeguarded against rack-renting (the demand of rent so great as to cause severe physical and mental distress).

(5) Recognition of both individual rights and valid social or community rights. Farming and rental practices should safeguard the fertility of the soil.

(6) Curbing speculation in land and the exploitation of weak or disadvantaged groups by moral sanction and by law.

(7) A graduated land tax and inheritance laws to guard against too large estates on the one hand and too small or uneconomical holdings on the other.

(8) Sensitive regard for the needs and capacities of underprivileged groups and those of limited financial means in the allocation of land.

(9) Provision for experiments in the cooperative cultivation of land or other appropriate forms of land allocation in densely populated areas.

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\**Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin*, Number 68, page 1.

(10) Concern for all groups but actuated by a desire to create conditions so that all people can lead a better life and develop a true sense of social responsibility.

(11) Recognition of the moral and religious implications of land use, wholesome family living, and stable community life as the goal of land policy.

### *Some Tension Areas*

Land tenure is the weakest link in the social and political chain of many countries in the world. The dislocations of World War II and the advance of communism have helped to highlight tension areas in much of Asia. In zones of population density, where the best possible man-land adjustment should prevail, we too often find a feudalistic land system. For years millions have been ground between two millstones. At the top there is a landowning class living from land rents and usury. At the bottom is a crop-weary soil, capable only of low and uncertain yields. Recently a missionary in the Philippines warned against rents that were taking up to seventy per cent of the crops, and usurious interest rates of one hundred per cent. "What can we expect from the people when they seem to have all to gain and so little to lose by revolt," he said. "The Communist promise of quick access to land is almost irresistible."

The Bell Report on Land Tenure in the Philippines observes, "Land is the most important source of wealth in the Philippines and its concentration or distribution is the primary factor that affects the social and economic well-being of the people. . . . Large profits enjoyed at various times by the landowner class have gone into the acquisition of more land. The result is that land ownership by farmers who work the land has steadily declined. Land values have risen so much that tenants have little or no chance whatever of owning equities in the land they farm."\*

An editorial in the *Manila Bulletin* for December 19, 1950, says, "Land reform came too late in China but it is still not too

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\*Report of the Economic Survey Mission to the Philippines, page 55.



late elsewhere in Asia, in the opinion of some of our top thinkers. . . . It is being tried successfully in Formosa and in Japan under military occupation." A program of land reform has been carried forward in Japan by the Military Government with the result that tenancy in some areas has decreased from fifty-five to fifteen per cent. The tenure problem there has not been solved by any means. The average farm has only 2.5 acres and the new owners are often hard pressed for equipment and methods to operate them economically. Much education in the responsibilities of land ownership will be needed, and necessary adjustments must be made before we can say that lasting tenure reform has been achieved. But a beginning has been made and the people are pleased.

The new government in India has probably undertaken the most far-reaching program of land reform to be found anywhere in the world. Only a few months after India received her independence nearly 60,000 peasants appeared in Lucknow pressing their claims for land. Assured by the new government that land reform was high on the priority list, they agreed to go home and wait. To revamp the land system of so vast a country as India, with over eighty per cent of the people illiterate, is a formidable task. It will require a long time, but notable beginnings have been made on four parts of the program:

- (1) To abolish the 150-year-old *Zamindari* (landlord) system and make land available to peasants in tracts ranging in size from six and one-half to thirty acres.

- (2) To limit the rate of rent paid by tenants to one-fourth of the crop in case of irrigated lands and one-third crop for other lands. Year-to-year leasing is to be discarded in favor of long-term leases. The ten-year lease is favored.

- (3) To invest authority in the village for the local administration of land.

- (4) To provide for experiments in cooperative farming, especially for new lands being brought under cultivation, where power equipment is to be owned jointly by farmers. In several of the more densely populated areas of small scattered holdings there are to be efforts to test out the possibility of joint use of power equipment and joint cultivation.

Land reform is more than an economic problem. It is a moral and a religious problem as well. It cannot be precipitated by revolution or by legislation alone. When the fires of revolution die down the old causes still remain. The Old Testament is replete with warnings about man's duty to his neighbor and to God in the use of land. It was unthinkable that a family should be alienated from its inherent rights in the land. As a divinely created resource, land should be a testing ground for Christian action and conduct. Dean Liberty Hyde Bailey declares, "One does not act rightly toward one's fellows if one does not act rightly toward the earth."\* Land was created as a means of life and as a home for the human family. Its rightful use, therefore, becomes a matter of moral concern which faces Christians squarely.

### *Foreign Missions and Land Reform*

At the heart of foreign missions is the fact that their work is largely among the dispossessed peoples of the earth who own very little or no land. To establish a church and to rear Christian families the people must experience at least some of the stability and security which land can provide.

By its very nature, land reform is a government responsibility. Missions can educate their members to the interrelations of Christianity and politics so that influence may be exerted by them for responsible use of government power. There is also much that Christian missions can do through first-hand contacts with village people. Limited by lack of resources, the chief value of missionary effort lies often in local projects of a pilot or experimental nature such as the following.

#### **KHERGAUM CHRISTIAN COOPERATIVE SOCIETY, INDIA**

Twenty-two years ago sixteen men, including village farmers, Christian teachers, a carpenter and a tailor, formed the Khergaum Christian Cooperative Credit Society in India. The village pastor led in prayer at an initial meeting and read Paul's familiar words, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law

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\*Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Holy Earth*, p. 2.



of Christ." The Society has sought to carry out these words within a two-fold purpose:

1. To provide a means whereby people can help each other socially, economically and religiously.
2. To establish families on land.

The Society was to be a "poor man's bank" whereby members would lend money to each other for worthy causes at moderate rates of interest. A little over 300 rupees was accumulated from the purchase of shares by charter members and a loan of 1200 rupees was received from the Church of the Brethren to provide operating capital. Taking advantage of sound counsel, the Society has had a steady growth during the years. According to a recent report, the membership has increased to 129. Of the membership, 64 are village farmers and 65 are teachers, craftsmen and others. Operating on a small mutual self-help scale, loans were made during the last five years as follows:

To buy land	Rupees 11,021
To pay old debts	8,349
To buy work oxen	4,776
To build homes	3,278
For education	1,337
To buy farm implements	1,151
To build wells	555
For clothing and food	337

Since the beginning, members have been able to secure a total of over 184 acres of land, purchase 165 head of cattle and build or remodel 92 homes. However meaningful these figures are when translated into better home and family living, the real achievement is the stable community of Christian families, and the village church of 520 members. While this is only a local effort, it would be hard to overestimate the leavening value of mutual self-help given in a spirit of Christian concern.

#### LAND SETTLEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

In parts of the Philippines there are still government lands

available for settlement and colonization. To take advantage of such lands a farmer would need financial resources to grow the first crops, build a house, and maintain his family for a year. This would rule out most of the families who are in greatest need of the land. Here too, cooperative credit, whereby people are joined as "all for one and one for all" has proven itself to be a useful tool. Missionaries such as Allen Huber and Cornelio Ferrer of the Rural Church Department have gone all out to promote, organize, and guide cooperative credit societies on sound lines. In the face of communism and pending agrarian revolution, these men and their colleagues believe that "the Filipino peasants will give their loyalty to those who share and who care most." As in other missionary efforts, the limiting factors are a reasonable amount of working funds and qualified personnel.

#### HELP FOR "STAIRCASE" FARMERS

High in the Andes of Ecuador the United Andean Mission has been formed for a special work among the Indians. Now in their fourth year of operation, the missionaries—an agriculturist and a Christian education man—are studying plans for helping peons to get established on land of their own. At Guatajata, Bolivia, the Canadian Baptist Mission during the years has aided over seventy Indian families in establishing farm homes of their own. Today their well-kept fields and neatly painted houses and interest in church, school, and community stand out in happy contrast to the serfdom from which they have arisen. The success of this and similar homestead projects has helped to stimulate government interest in colonization on a broader scale.

The Incas of old had their own unique system of land tenure at the time of the Spanish conquests. Some of their sturdily constructed land terraces still stand as a memorial to their great rural culture. But today a feeling of despair and bitterness characterizes the Indians who are peons on what were the "great staircase lands" of their proud ancestors. The experiences of missionaries working among the Indians of the Andes indicate



that land is the most effective key to their hearts. Efforts to communicate the Christian gospel will get much further if missionaries seek to meet in tangible ways the Indians' inborn hunger for land.

In China, solid groundwork was laid by the careful research of J. Lossing Buck and others from the College of Agriculture and Forestry at the University of Nanking. Their research on Land Utilization in China was no doubt one of the most comprehensive studies ever made in Asia. It provided the basic information essential to carrying out a program of land reform, but the necessary action by government came after the breakdown of the Nationalist government was already irretrievably under way.

### *What of the Future?*

Most of the people among whom missionaries serve are in the throes of land reform. The people are on the move but this does not necessarily mean that they will move forward. The problems of land reform will no longer wait; they will be solved in one way or another. What we see among the underprivileged peoples of the world today is in one sense not revolution. As they press their legitimate claims for land and a greater degree of social and economic justice, they are really asking for a place in the democratic household of free nations.

What has been done so far through rural missions is pitifully small when compared with our Christian imperative so clearly calling for a righteous stewardship of the land. All land is the handiwork of God, and we serve Him or dishonor Him by the use we make of it. We need a much larger number of rural missionaries who are qualified both technically and religiously to do the kind of job that Christians ought to be doing in lands where events of history are moving so rapidly. In a letter just at hand, Dr. E. M. Clark, a veteran rural missionary to Japan, pleads, "The distribution of land is nearly over, but in the achievement of land reform there is a long way to go. We need personnel and resources to open a Christian rural service and training center in each of the four hundred odd counties of

Japan, so that qualified Christian leaders are near at hand to help to lift and strengthen life on the land." With village people dependent upon what happens to the land, the Church in its rural world mission faces one of the great challenges of its history.

### *The Church and Land Tenure in the United States*

In appointing a special committee on land tenure in the year 1940, the Town and Country Committee and the Home Missions Council of North America declared the growing interest of the churches in rural people and the land. While our land system in the United States does have its unique values, there are trends today of special interest and concern to churchmen. Certain questions arise:

#### *(1) Do we really have a land policy?*

We have generally assumed that wide distribution of land ownership among cultivators is desirable. We have legislation which favors family farm holdings, like the Preemption Act, 1841, the Homestead Act, 1862, and the Bankhead Jones Act of 1937. But a look at certain trends leaves some room for doubt as to how closely we are following the Jeffersonian concept that "ownership of land shall be vested in the tiller."

Some notable trends are:

- (a) Increase in size of land holdings with operation units embracing two or more farms.
- (b) Growing number of tenants pushed down the agricultural ladder, or off the land entirely by mechanization.
- (c) Increase in average age of farm operators and a smaller proportion of young men entering farming.

Offsetting these trends somewhat, however, is the fact that absentee ownership by finance organizations has been decreasing since 1935.

#### *(2) Are we moving unwittingly toward a closed shop type of farming and land ownership?*

Records of farm land transactions reveal an abnormally large



number of purchases by urban investors and by farmers wishing to enlarge their already adequate holdings. Teachers of vocational agriculture point out lessening opportunity for a young man to climb the agricultural ladder, unless his parents or near relatives have land.

(3) *What is the future for disadvantaged families in American agriculture?*

In normal times we have a third of a million sharecroppers living in a state of semi-feudalism and more than a third of a million migratory laborers roaming the highways with their families in search of seasonal crop work. We have some unfinished business of our own in land reform. Merely to focus our attention upon larger and better equipped family farms as the American ideal is to ignore this important segment of our population whose plight is the more tragic since it occurs in the midst of abundant land resources.

### *The Church's Opportunity*

The Land Tenure Committee has done much through community studies, regional land tenure conferences and publications to direct the attention of churchmen and social scientists toward improved land tenure as a basis for better rural family living and enriched church and community life. The religious and moral implications of land use are more widely recognized than before. The Church has a unique opportunity and obligation to become the conscience of the Western world for land reform.

The Bible was our first book dealing with land tenure and it would seem that each theological seminary preparing men for the rural ministry should offer instruction in ethics of land tenancy and ownership. Our land use is to a large degree still geared to exploitive forms of rural development. While we have developed limited but rich experience in family-type farming and in bridging the land ownership gap between generations, we have yet to face squarely the non-material values in-

herent in land use and the moral aspects of land renting, size of holding, and contracts of sale.

Each church community might well have a working committee for helping to create improved family-land relationships. Such a committee should serve community-wide interests in the establishment of families on land rather than one church denomination only.

With our growing awareness of the interdependence of the world community, with rapid increase of the world population and with the rising legitimate demands for justice from more and more people, improved land tenure relationships must now become a matter of *major* Christian concern and action. The prophet Micah gave us our clue when he said "What does the Lord require of thee but to do justly and love mercy."



## LAND REFORM —

# Hope of Democracy

*By Joseph Ackerman*

Land reform has been the basis of revolution in times past. Many uprisings can be traced to unrest and discontent among those tilling the land. Land reform has become a particularly crucial problem today for the American people because communism thrives on agrarian unrest. To those suffering injustices a change is welcome. The communists have made changes, and peasants, anxious to improve their situation, have been only too ready to give their allegiance. But these changes have been made with a view to ultimate domination of the people. The peasants soon find themselves hemmed in by controls, beset by various demands, betrayed by the very conditions they sought to create, unable to offer more than passive resistance. They have only traded one master for another.

The preservation of Western democracy depends in great part upon our ability to offer to depressed agrarians an alternative way of life that has greater promise than communism. More and more people are beginning to realize this, and in recent months great interest has been shown in the achievement of democratic land reform through the strengthening of the family farm.

### *What Is a Family Farm?*

The significance of the family farm is indicated in the excellent interpretation of the concept prepared by a group of people attending a conference in 1948 on "A Protestant Program for the Family Farm." They envision as the ideal family farm one on which:

1. **Emphasis is placed on farming as a way of life as well as on its economic returns.**

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Mr. Ackerman is Associate Managing Director of the Farm Foundation, Chicago.



2. Management is vested primarily in the family that lives on and operates the farm.
3. Most of the labor is contributed by the family.
4. Opportunity is available for full use of the skills and abilities of the equivalent of at least one and up to two or three adult men.
5. Full and efficient use of all of the land, labor, and capital invested in the enterprise is possible.
6. All people on the farm attain adequate: (a) diet, clothing, and housing; (b) health facilities; (c) educational opportunity for children and adults; (d) recreational and social facilities; (e) religious opportunities and activities; (f) security for old age.
7. Food, fibers, and other products needed for domestic consumption and for export will be produced.
8. The available physical resources, including soil, forest, and water as well as farm equipment, will be fully conserved and restored.

### *Contributions Made by the Family Farm*

This conference group felt that certain moral, social, political, and economic values could best be perpetuated in rural communities through the family farm. These include:

*For the individual:* Family farms stimulate the development of craftsmanship, provide creative work experiences for children, offer opportunity for making managerial adjustments, offer security for the individual, provide favorable environment for development of a rich religious life.

*For the family:* Family farms develop family unity, offer excellent opportunity for discipline and character training, offer economic security, develop family stability as witnessed by low divorce and delinquency rates.

*For the community:* Family farms increase neighborliness and community consciousness, support community institutions, promote a classless rural society, underwrite moral and religious standards.

*For the nation:* Family farms provide capable youth for urban enterprise, provide a bulwark for genuine "free enterprise," give support to democracy and its institutions, produce efficiently the nation's food supply, tend to conserve natural resources, contribute to national and international programs of relief and reconstruction.

## *View of Secretary of Agriculture*

Secretary of Agriculture Brannan in a recent speech on "Agriculture's Role in War and Peace" said that one long-term objective of America was safeguarding the family-farm principle as democracy's answer to collectivist land reorganization. He emphasized that human freedom must not be sacrificed in the false name of "collective efficiency." At addresses before the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, the National Grange, and the North Dakota Farmers Union, Secretary Brannan urged Americans to accept their world responsibilities for strengthening democratic institutions by working for widespread land ownership, security of tenure, and equitable landlord-tenant relationships.

## *Plans Under Way for Domestic and Foreign Reform*

It is important that the American people know of some of the plans now under way for such leadership. The Department of Agriculture has formed a committee, headed by Under Secretary McCormick, to examine the policies of the Department for the family farm. This committee is divided into working parties which will study each agency within the Department, indicate the good features in existing programs, recommend changes which can be made under existing legislation, and outline the additional authority or legislation necessary to strengthen the family farm program.

The State Department has organized an inter-agency committee to study land tenure problems in foreign countries. Information obtained will be used to formulate a policy for effecting as much land reform as possible through diplomatic channels and through our technical aid and economic assistance programs in foreign countries.

At the Fourth Inter-American Conference on Agriculture, at Montevideo, December 6, 1950, the United States delegation presented a resolution recommending a system of land tenure which would offer the operator an opportunity to own the land or lease it under equitable conditions, thus encouraging the at-

tainment of maximum economic and social opportunities. The resolution suggests:

1. That each American Republic review its policies and programs so as to determine whether rural families have at their disposal services and facilities . . . necessary to and consequent upon the growth of democracy.
2. That each of these Governments direct its agricultural policy toward achieving welfare of the rural families.
3. That international organizations develop, encourage, and help the execution of these policies and programs in cooperation with each and every nation and to the greatest extent desired by these nations.

A few days before the Inter-American Conference, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for an analysis of the degree to which unsatisfactory systems of land tenure in underdeveloped areas impede economic development and depress standards of living. The resolution also proposed that recommendations be made for improving agrarian conditions and for governments of underdeveloped countries to use the facilities of the U.N. program of technical assistance in planning these improvements.

With this brief summary of principles for land reform as background, let us analyze what has happened in some crucial countries. Both the obstacles to and opportunities for strengthening democracy through land reform are revealed in the stories of Korea, Japan, Puerto Rico and Czechoslovakia.

## KOREA

Immediately following the end of World War II the United States Army Military Government authorities in South Korea conducted a successful tenant-purchase program. Clyde Mitchell, who was a Military Government official in Korea and Administrator of the National Land Administration from September 1946 to May 1948, reported that farmers' response to the program was highly enthusiastic.

### *Revolutionary Redistribution of Land Ownership*

Over 1,400,000 farm plots, formerly owned by the Japanese,



were sold to 588,000 Korean tenants, to be paid in grain with the price fixed at three times the annual production. The farmer was allowed fifteen years in which to pay, which meant that his minimum annual payment would be about 20 per cent of an average year's crop. Farmers were allowed to pay in advance and liquidate their mortgages at an earlier date. Payments could be postponed in case of crop failure.

Under the Japanese the Korean tenant-farmer paid a rental charge of from 50 to 70 per cent of his crop. Under the tenant-purchase program the farmer can buy his land for less than he formerly paid as rent.

As might be expected, some problems were encountered in administering the program. A land reform program offers tremendous opportunity for patronage, and precautions had to be taken against political pressure in selecting tenants. Because unexpected problems arose, local committees did not function as effectively as might be desired. Preparation of the numerous forms for sales presented another problem.

This program will raise the proportion of owners from about 30 per cent to about 60 per cent of the total number of farmers. The remaining 40 per cent are tenants renting land from private Korean landlords, and this program does not cover them. The program was planned in the hope that it would serve as a pattern for future development in Korea, but whether it will be extended will depend upon the Korean government.

### *Contrast with Soviet-Sponsored Land Reform*

In contrast to South Korea the Soviet-sponsored land reform in North Korea, which went into effect in 1946, provided that farms above a certain size be turned over to the farmers, without transfer of title. The farmer was given the right to cultivate the land, but only as long as he was satisfactory to the local Communist Peoples Committee. The farmer has no ownership rights in the land and is assessed a land tax of 27 per cent of his rice crop, plus a "voluntary" rice collection quota, which ordinarily leaves him less than 30 per cent of the grain produced.

## JAPAN

World-wide implications are to be drawn also from the Japanese land reform put into effect by the Occupation authorities. Here, too, the people lived on small plots of land and produced crops with enormous amounts of labor. Tenancy rates were high, especially in rice growing areas. The few who owned land were constantly in danger of losing it and were almost as insecure as the tenants.

### *Extermination of "Pernicious Ills"*

The Japanese land reform program was started in 1946 and completed in 1950. When the program was started, 70 per cent of the Japanese farmers rented all or part of their land, and of these farmers one-third owned no land. Now 70 per cent are owners, only 6 per cent are landless tenants, and the remaining 24 per cent own some land. Even more significant is the fact that 12 per cent of the land is farmed under written tenant leases, subject to the scrutiny of elected land commissioners.

General MacArthur, in ordering the land reform program in December, 1945, said:

In order that the Imperial Japanese Government shall remove economic obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies, establish respect for the dignity of man and destroy the economic bondage which has enslaved the Japanese farmer to centuries of feudal oppression, the Japanese Imperial Government is directed to take measures to insure that those who till the soil of Japan shall have more equal opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their labor. The purpose of this order is to exterminate those pernicious ills which have long blighted the agrarian structure of a land where almost half the total population is engaged in husbandry.

### *Effect on Social Life of Japan*

This reform movement called not only for the transfer of ownership, but also for tremendous changes in the social lives of the people. The government was authorized to purchase from owners for resale to tenants all tenant-farmer land owned by non-residents of the village, and all tenant-farmer land in excess





of 2.5 acres (10 acres in the Northern island of Hokkaido where a more extensive agriculture is practiced) owned by residents of the village. Moreover, all owner-farmer land in excess of 7.5 acres was to be purchased (25 acres in Hokkaido) unless it could be proved that the owner had sufficient family labor to cultivate a larger area or that subdivision would result in decreased production.

The work of land transfers was the responsibility of village land commissions composed of ten men democratically elected by landlords, owner-cultivators, and tenants. These village commissioners in turn elected a 20-man land commission of landlords, owner-cultivators, and tenants in each of the 46 prefectures of Japan. These prefectural commissions were appeal bodies which ratified the decisions of the village commissions.

Laurence Hewes, formerly land reform specialist at the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Tokyo, summarized well the social effects of this program:

Two great feudal classes have been abolished. For the first time in the history of Japan peasants have the full stature of free men. They have accepted this new position quietly and with dignity but also they are now accorded by their fellow citizens a respect formerly lacking. The institution of private property has been greatly strengthened because of its wider extension among a great number of people. While many problems remain to be solved in rural Japan, I feel quite sure that these will be dealt with in a peaceful and democratic fashion.

## PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico is another area where the pressure of the population on the land is tremendous. About two million people earn their livelihood largely from agriculture on an island of little more than two million acres, only 47 per cent of which was cropland in 1940. This scarcity of land accompanied by concentration in the hands of a few has caused extreme, widespread poverty. In 1934-35, sugar mills and allied interests controlled 400,000 acres or almost 20 per cent of the total land on the

island. This acreage included over 50 per cent of the land in farms growing sugar cane. In 1941, even after some improvement in the land concentration situation, 0.4 per cent of the farms growing sugar cane produced 56 per cent of the crop.

### *Attempts at Land Reform*

The first attempt at land reform in Puerto Rico was made by the Homestead Commission created in 1921. This agency purchased farms mostly from private persons and divided them into small farms for agricultural laborers, either renting the farms or providing for gradual acquisition through the amortization of the value of the farm. The Homestead Commission established 2,074 farms comprising about 23,750 acres.

The Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, created in 1935, established over 10,000 subsistence farms of one to three acres and almost 1,000 farms of three to 500 acres.

The Farm Security Administration's Tenant Purchase Program was initiated in Puerto Rico in 1938. Under this program a number of farms, each capable of sustaining a satisfactory level of living, were created.

The Land Law of 1941 established a Land Authority to enforce the 500-acre limitation prescribed in an act passed by the Congress of the United States in 1900. Under this act the possession and operation of land by corporations was limited to 500 acres. The idea was to prevent a few corporations from acquiring unlimited quantities of land and to prevent absentee ownership, but many felt that this restriction was an impediment in the development of the sugar industry, and the law was openly violated. The Land Law extended the 500-acre limitation to partnerships as well as to corporations.

The functions of the Land Authority were to put an end to the large corporate holdings and to prevent their reappearance, to assist in the creation of new landowners, and to take action leading to the most scientific, economic, and efficient use of land for public benefit. The Land Authority is granted priority in acquiring lands at sales held by receivers appointed by the Supreme Court in legal proceedings involving violation of the

500-acre limitation. The price is agreed upon by the corporation and the Authority and approved by the Supreme Court.

On the land acquired from violators of the limitation and from other sources the Authority is authorized to establish individual holdings of not less than five nor more than twenty-five acres of land. The Authority is empowered to fix the conditions of sale except that the repayment period cannot be more than 40 years, nor the rate of interest be higher than five per cent nor lower than half of one per cent above the rate of interest fixed for the bonds issued by the Authority on these lands.

On this land the Authority can also establish small plots of from about one-fourth of an acre to three acres to be distributed among the squatters who previously lived on land belonging to another. The smaller plots are given to the squatter without charge. He may acquire additional land by paying for it in yearly installments of not more than \$3.00.

### *Profit-Sharing Farms for Efficient Production*

The Authority can also use the acquired land for proportional profit farms. These farms range in size from 100 to 500 acres and may be larger if necessary for higher productive efficiency. They are leased to qualified managers under conditions fixed by a contract between the Authority and the manager. Estimates were that 175,000 acres of land would be subject to redistribution under the 500-acre law, but since there were at least 175,000 landless agricultural workers, subdivision of these lands would result in uneconomic units. The proportional profit farm, which maintains efficient production and good management and at the same time divides profits among a large number of workers, overcomes this difficulty. The manager receives a fixed proportion of the net profit, and this is an inducement toward efficient management. The laborers participate in the profits according to the number of days worked and the wages received.

## **CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

Czechoslovakia, like many other countries, had two major types of land ownership—large, landed estates and small holdings of



scattered plots. The problem, therefore, was not only to break up the large holdings in order to enlarge small holdings and to create new farms, but also to consolidate the scattered plots of the small farmer, who wasted a great deal of time going from one plot to another.

### *Three Programs of Land Redistribution*

The first land reform laws in Czechoslovakia were passed in 1919 and 1920. Holdings were limited to 625 acres of land or 370 acres of agricultural land, and any excess land could be purchased by the government. The acquired land could be partitioned and sold or rented to small farmers, landless people, workers, cooperatives, public bodies, and institutions. Under special circumstances owners were allowed to hold up to 1,250 acres. Property held by public bodies and other interests was exempted for various reasons deemed to be for the public welfare. Under this program about 12 per cent of the agricultural land of Czechoslovakia was acquired by the government for redistribution.

In 1947 the earlier act was revised to eliminate the numerous exemptions. In addition, farms formed from previously expropriated lands were limited to 125 acres in size, and such farms were subject to expropriation if the land was not being farmed. The act also provided that in case of urgent local need or in the public interest any land in excess of 125 acres could be taken. The owner was compensated at the same rate as in the first land reform, but since the price of land had increased considerably, the owners received much less than the current value of the land. This revision made possible the redistribution of an additional eight per cent of the agricultural land.

By a presidential decree issued in 1945, agricultural land belonging to Germans, Hungarians, and enemies of the government was confiscated without indemnity. This land was to be distributed to farmers in plots 20 to 32 acres in size depending upon the quality of the land. Agricultural laborers, members of cooperatives, and public bodies were also eligible for allocations. The price of such land was set at a value equal to one

to two years' average harvest from the land, and for buildings at one to three years' rent. Payment could be made in either money or crops. The total amount could be paid the first year, or the amount could be paid in installments during a period not to exceed 15 years. Under special circumstances the land could be given away free. Workers and small tradesmen were eligible for plots up to one and one-fourth acres for home sites and gardens. About 23 per cent of the agricultural land was confiscated under this decree.

### *The Communists Come to Power*

Under these three programs almost 43 per cent of the agricultural land was subject to redistribution.\* Czechoslovakia had apparently made considerable progress in land reform, and some of the programs might have had far-reaching effects had not the communists come to power.

The communists came into power in 1948 and enacted a new land program. It had three major provisions: (1) holdings of all land (not only agricultural land) shall be limited to 125 acres; (2) only those who cultivate the land shall be allowed to hold land; and (3) inventory, including livestock, shall be expropriated in the same proportion as land. The new acreage limitation affected only a small proportion of the farmers, but the other two provisions had great possibilities in promoting the purposes of the communists. The provision that only those working the land may own it provided the state with the opportunity to decide whether a farmer is working his farm properly. The dangers of such a power are obvious. The state could confiscate property almost at will. The provision that inventory be expropriated in the same proportion as land provided further opportunity for abuses. Since there is no direct ratio between the size of the farm and inventory, the expropriation of inventory could lead to inefficient operations, making the land subject to confiscation.

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\*After World War I the government also started a program for the purpose of encouraging operators voluntarily to exchange their scattered plots to make more compact farm units. Some progress was made under this program, but chiefly further subdivision of holdings was prevented.

## *Communist Strategy of Land Control*

The pattern of the communists in Czechoslovakia seems to have been to cripple operations on farms large enough to be economically independent, to confiscate the land, and to give it to the small farmers and the landless, thus gaining their support. At the same time the communists retained sufficient control over the small farmers to make them responsive to the state's wishes. When the larger holdings were subdivided sufficiently to curtail production and people were anxious to overcome the inefficiencies of inadequate units, collective farms were introduced to relieve the situation.

## MODERNIZING LAND TENURE POLICY

The systems of land tenure in much of the world have not kept pace with technological progress and poorly serve the economic, social, and religious needs of men. In some countries hunger and starvation stalk everywhere, while much of the land is capable of greater productivity under efficient operation. Many land systems are still based on the feudal concept of superior-inferior relationships among men, and maintained by powerful people interested chiefly in preserving the status quo.

### *Adapting Land Reform to Each Country*

Before land reform in a particular country can be planned the culture of the area must be fully understood. Social and economic systems not only vary from one country to another but they are usually so different from the United States' that principles developed here cannot be directly transplanted. Because of these differences people in most underdeveloped countries cannot readily understand the meaning of democracy. We cannot merely describe our privileges—freedom of the individual, better standards of living—and expect these people to comprehend the democratic way of life. Indeed, the relation of natural resources to population may be such that they can never attain our standards of living. In that case they can only feel that we are indulging in idle boasting.



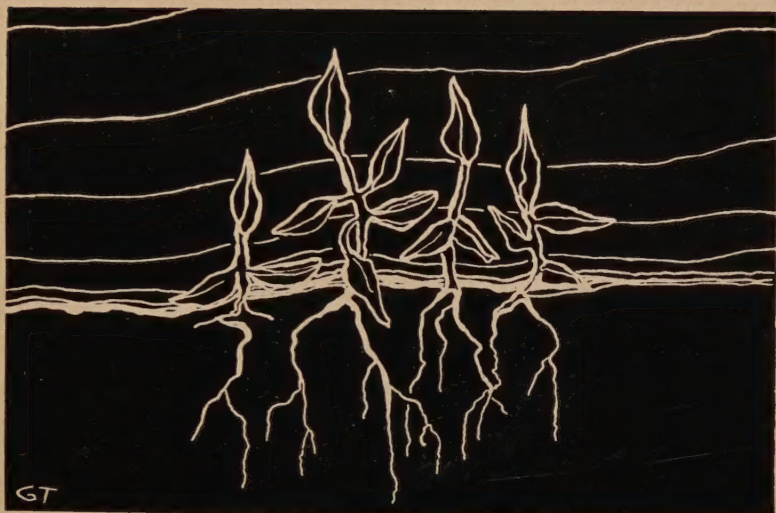
## *Development of Industries*

In addition to redistribution of land, development of industries is needed in many countries, for industrial development and agricultural development complement each other. Industries should be developed not only to provide employment for some of the people now on the land but also to provide income for people in the cities to purchase the increased supply of agricultural products made possible by more efficient operations. With increased agricultural production the farmers will have more income to purchase not only the necessities, but also the conveniences and the luxuries produced by industry.

## *Education and Land Reform*

A careful and extensive program of education will need to accompany any attempts at land reform. First of all, those who have something to lose need to be aided in understanding the necessity of land reform. Existing social orders and philosophies developed over the centuries are deeply entrenched and people who have something to lose from social change will find the acceptance of it extremely difficult. But unless the people voluntarily accept a proposed plan, we will defeat our purpose. Democratic principles cannot be demonstrated by using force or violence. Gross inequalities should be eliminated and oppression relieved, but the process used must be fair and just. Injustices cannot be corrected by creating other injustices. Nor can any program founded upon unjust methods long endure.

After the land has been redistributed those who have benefited through the land reform need to be educated. Accustomed to operating only a small unit, most of these people will be ignorant of modern, efficient methods that can be employed on their new economic unit. They need to be informed of the latest scientific farm management techniques. Education will be needed not only in the economic but also in the social aspects of rural life. With more efficient production, farmers will have more time for recreational activities. With increased income they will be able to afford better medical and dental care, more modernized homes, better education for their children.



Land reform alone is not sufficient to bring freedom and justice to impoverished peoples. A program to improve man's relation to man is needed, and such a program must include the spiritual aspect. Superior-inferior relations cannot be eliminated merely by equalizing land holdings. Men come to regard all others as fellow men and to have a sincere desire to improve the position of less fortunate people only as their innermost beliefs are changed.

The world is being threatened by communism, and the record is clear that supporters of communism have often been tricked by empty promises into a system of oppression from which escape is more difficult than from their previous state. Certainly democracy is a more desirable alternative, but the countries where land reform is needed most must be made to realize this before they are engulfed by communism. The world needs a democratic land tenure policy, and America, whose very beginnings are rooted in democratic principles, should take a major responsibility in achieving such a program.

## Religious Art in Social Action

Social Action readers have been expressing a keen appreciation for the way in which the religious and social themes of the issues have been integrated and expressed through the magazine's art work over the past few months. This has been the work of Gregor Thompson, graduate student in art and religion at Yale University.

Miss Thompson is one of the few people to our knowledge who combines the triple force of a deep understanding of social problems, a mastery of modern art techniques and profound Protestant Christian convictions. We think you will be interested in a portion of a personal Credo which she recently wrote:

*A great deal of modern art may come to be remembered as a particular kind of religious art. This religious art expresses some prophetic understanding of the diseases of the modern spirit, but it is quite different from the usual "sweetness and light" pictures of bearded shepherds and nice ladies reading Bibles. For a great deal of the creative talent of our time has expended itself in articulating the despair of contemporary existence. At first glance it seems entirely a negative approach but its religious grounding is apparent because it calls to mind the questions of existence and the contingency of human life. Thus the prophetic art is not religious in that it serves liturgy but in its expression of the anxiety in finite existence.*

*It is a difficult question as to how such modern art may come to be appropriated by the church in worship or liturgy. Yet artists who are compelled to express the remoteness of faith in God in contemporary life may be preparing the way for a symbolism of faith coming after the experiences of despair and meaninglessness. The problem of any artist sharing the faith of the Christian community is to understand the modern symbols of contingency and yet at the same time to try to express not simply despair and aloneness but a finitude seen in relation to the Christian revelation.*

The Protestant social action movement has done little to symbolize and objectify its convictions. This magazine eagerly anticipates the new art series which Miss Thompson plans for the coming publishing year as an important contribution to the communication of the Christian faith in the modern world.

—K. U.



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## A Note from the Editor

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### *Social Action* announces 1951-1952 Primer Series

#### **A Christian Faith for This World**

Planning conferences of writers, researchers and editors are now under way to make the 1951-1952 series of *Social Action* issues into what we believe will be the most important popular formulation of the religious and social bases of Protestant action developed in the past decade.

Advance arrangements with a number of important church and educational groups for the use of this primer series indicate that it may well be the medium of a new Protestant communication of the relevance of Christianity to the modern world.

The primer series will relate a common Christian perspective to the basic facts of politics, economics, public opinion, world affairs and the local church. It is planned to help you develop an *interpretive framework* for making sense out of the thousands of claims, admonitions and events that press in upon you.

All present *Social Action* subscribers will receive their full ten issues for which they subscribed. All \$1.50 yearly subscriptions received after July 1 will be for six issues under the new publishing program.

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Roland Bainton, author of the best seller *Here I Stand*, has said—

*Social Action is well informed, disturbed and disturbing where complacency resides. The proposals set forth are discriminating, forthright, even provocative, always grounded in the actual.*

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